

Steven Sepe

From: Kelly Nevins <knevins@wfri.org>
Sent: Thursday, March 4, 2021 1:01 PM
To: House Finance Committee
Subject: Women's Fund of RI supports H5102

Memo To: Senate Health & Human Services Committee
From: Kelly Nevins, CEO of Women's Fund of Rhode Island
Date: March 4, 2021
Regards: H-5012 Nursing Home Staffing & Quality Care Act

Women's Fund of Rhode Island (WFRI) writes in support of bill H-5012, the Nursing Home Staffing & Quality Care Act. This bill addresses a crisis we see in our nursing homes that is driven by low pay, resulting in inadequate staffing and patient care. It specifies that every nursing home resident gets a minimum of 4.1 hours of care per day and raises wages for caregivers to at least \$15 per hour. Currently, Rhode Island has no minimum number of care hours per patient mandated; nursing homes are paid by the number of beds filled. As a result, the focus is on ensuring beds are filled, and not quality of care.

Consider a true experience by one of our supporters just this past month. Amelia is a senior living in a high rise building in Providence. She was released from the hospital into a nursing care home as she recovered from an operation, requiring a special diet and exercise under supervision from staff at the home. Right from the day she arrived, she had trouble getting nurses and other staff to make sure she was getting the right meals and often was only able to have jello for a meal because they couldn't seem to get the doctor's orders for her restrictions correct. She arrived the day that all the regular patients got their COVID vaccine and was not able to get one. For the next 10 days, she was not allowed to leave her room for exercise because she did not have a vaccine shot, even with a mask. She also had to clean herself with a damp cloth every day, because no one was available to help oversee her shower. Eventually, she gave up and was able to convince her doctor she would be better off at home than in nursing home care. She believes her experience was due to low staffing by the staff who were there.

In Rhode Island and across the United States, women far outnumber men as direct care workers, including Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs), Case Managers, Medication Aides, Direct Support Professionals, and Personal Care Aids. In fact, according to a report we published in 2020 called [The Uneven Path: State Investments in Women's Economic Security](#), 90% of workers in local nursing homes are women. 47% of them are women of color, and who are significantly disadvantaged by caregiving pay inequities.

Unfortunately, direct care jobs do not provide economic stability to women (especially those of color) and their families. As a result, they are generally more likely to live in poverty and rely on public benefits than their counterparts. In this context, improving the economic well-being of women in direct care would improve their quality of life and it would help to attract workers to this important occupation, as well as retain them.

As a twin health pandemic and economic crisis have raged this year, we have taken to calling direct care workers "essential" and "heroes." We need to support our heroes by ensuring their basic needs for a living wage and adequate protection are met, including ensuring that the places they work are adequately staffed for the purposes they serve. Caregivers are working to the point of exhaustion as nursing homes aren't hiring enough staff. Having too few workers available to address the needs of our most vulnerable elderly patients is a disservice to both the patient and their care providers. Increasing wages for direct care workers and mandating a minimum number of hours of care per patient is vital not only to the health of both, but also to the economic security deserved by the caregiver, and to ensure our state has sufficient workers employed in this critical occupation.

WFRI urges members of the Rhode Island House to support this important bill.

The mission of the Women's Fund of Rhode Island is to invest in women and girls through research, advocacy, grant making and strategic partnerships designed to achieve gender equity through systemic change. Our research and other information can be found at www.wfri.org.

Sincerely,
Kelly Nevins
Chief Executive Officer
Women's Fund of Rhode Island
www.wfri.org
401-215-3311 (cell)
[Donate Here](#)
or Text "WOMENSFUNDRI" TO 44-321 to give

Need to schedule a meeting with me? Use this link to find some open times in my calendar:
<https://www.cloudhq.net/meeting/knevins@wfri.org>

Please note our new address is 133 Delaine Street, Providence, RI 02909

Want to leave a legacy of gender equity? To learn about your options,
visit: <https://wfri.org/planned-giving/>